

FIRE AND FALL PREVENTION FOR OUR OLDER ADULTS

Older adults who, at age 65, are twice as likely to be killed or injured by fires or falls, compared to the population at large. By age 75, that risk increases to three times that of the general population - four times at age 85.

Fire and burns are not the only hazards that threaten our older citizens. Statistics from the Center for Disease Control show that falls are the leading cause of death from unintentional injury in the home. Thirty percent of people ages 65 and older are involved in falls each year - some are fatal, while others permanently disable victims and may cause loss of mobility or independence.

Here are 16 safety tips regarding fire prevention and fall prevention:

Fire Prevention

Provide smokers with large deep ashtray. Wet cigarette butts and ashes before emptying ashtrays into a wastebasket. Never smoke when you are lying down, drowsy, or in bed.

Be kitchen wise. Wear tight fitting or rolled up sleeves when cooking. Use oven mitts to handle hot pans. Never leave cooking unattended. If a pan of food catches fire, slide a lid over it and turn off the burner. Don't cook if you are drowsy from alcohol or medication.

Stop, drop and roll. If your clothing catches on fire; stop (don't run), drop gently to the ground, cover your face with your hands, and roll over and over to smother the flames. If you cannot do that, smother the flames with a towel or blanket. Immerse burns in cool water for 10 to 15 minutes. If burns are severe, get medical help immediately.

Smoke alarms save lives. Have smoke alarms installed outside all sleeping areas and on every level of your home. Test your smoke alarms once a month

by pushing the test button. Make sure everyone in your home can hear your smoke alarm.

Plan and practice your escape from fire. Know two ways out of every room in your home. Make sure windows and doors open easily. In a fire, get out and stay out.

Know your local emergency number. Your emergency number is 911. Once you've escaped a fire, call the fire department from a neighbor's phone.

Plan your escape around your abilities. Have a telephone in your bedroom and post the local emergency number nearby in case you are trapped by fire.

Fall Prevention

Take your time. Being rushed or distracted increases your chance of falling. Get out of chairs slowly. Sit a moment before you get out of your bed. Stand and get your balance before you walk.

Clear the way. Keep stairs and walking areas free of electrical cords, shoes, clothing, books, magazines, and other clutter.

Look out for yourself. See an eye specialist once a year. Poor vision can increase your chance of falling. Improve the lighting in your home. Use night-lights to light the path between your bedroom and bathroom. Turn on the lights before using stairs.

Slippery when wet. Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors. Install grab bars on the wall next to the bathtub, shower, and toilet. Wipe up spilled liquids immediately.

Throw rugs can throw you. Use only throw rugs with rubber, non-skid backing. Always smooth out wrinkles and folds in carpeting.

Tread carefully. Stairways should be well lit from both top and bottom. Have easy-to-grip handrails installed along the full length of both sides of the stairs.

Best foot forward. Wear sturdy, well-fitting, low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles. These are safer than high heels, thick-soled athletic shoes, slippers, or stocking feet.

Exercise regularly to build strength and improve your balance and coordination. Ask your doctor about the best physical exercise for you.